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ABSTRACT

This 2-year qualitative action research project focused on improving the experiences within several sections of an advanced methods course in an undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program. The course stressed preservice teachers' developing conceptions of curriculum and of their roles in defining the nature of the curricula they will develop in their own classrooms, and it encouraged them to provide constructivist, contextually relevant, culturally responsive, and substantially meaningful experiences for children. This paper centers on the complexity of the dynamics of what preservice teachers and faculty experienced. The researcher collected course materials, instructor planning documents, field notes from an instructor/observer, instructors' reflective notes, notes from informal discussions between instructors, selected student materials, and examples of student writing. Six interrelated issues that resulted included (1) perceived resistance to intellectuality, (2) a shift from focusing on the self, (3) redefinition of the constituency for teacher education programs, (4) a focus on holistic professional development, (5) reconceptualization of the nature of teaching itself, and (6) replacement of popular conceptions of teaching with professional conceptions of teaching. These challenges place significant demands on teacher educators as they shape their own curricula. The paper discusses lessons for teacher educators to learn from the experience. (Contains 32 references.) (SM)

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THE CURRICULUM THINKING OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: "Why Can't We Just Do a Learning Center?"[1]

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ABSTRACT

As part of a multi-faceted grant initiative, a two-year qualitative action research project focused on improving the experiences within several sections of an advanced methods course in an undergraduate teacher preparation program in elementary education. Course purposes both stressed preservice teachers' developing conceptions of curriculum and of their roles in defining the nature of the curricula they will develop in their own classrooms and encouraged them in providing constructivist, contextually relevant, culturally responsive, and substantively meaningful experiences for children.

Discussion in the paper centers on the complexity of the dynamics of what preservice teachers and faculty experienced. Six interrelated issues are explored: a perceived resistance to intellectuality, a need to shift from a focus on the self, a redefinition of the constituency for teacher education programs, a focus on holistic professional development, a reconceptualization of the nature of teaching itself, and a need to replace popular conceptions of teaching with professional conceptions of teaching.

These challenges in turn place significant demands on teacher educators as they shape their own curricula. Critical are in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the interaction among faculty and students with regard to the elementary teacher's responsibilities and appreciation of the subtleties of student thinking. Preservice elementary teachers require both cognitive and emotional support throughout their experiences as they re-construct their views of teaching, learning, knowing, and knowledge within their professional preparation programs. Teacher educators, too, must re-construct their own roles by superseding the technocratic perspective with a clear focus on their own ideologies, the pedagogy to support them, and a deep commitment to on-going reflection. Only then may preservice elementary teachers be effectively encouraged toward assuming strong professional, highly intellectual, instructionally responsive, and philosophically committed roles in their classrooms.

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[1]The action research described in this paper correlated with activities related to the Jacksonville Urban Educational Partnership, an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching, under the Secretary's Fund for Innovation in Education, Teacher Professional Development, CFDA 84.215J. While the work described in this paper deals with project efforts for which I have been responsible, I am deeply indebted to my colleague Mosetta Cohen of the Florida Community College at Jacksonville for her contributions to the work of our team as its co-chair; her feedback and insight have been invaluable. I also wish to acknowledge the support from the other team members who also are faculty at the Florida Community College at Jacksonville: Carolyn Phanstiel and Faye Wisner.

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INTRODUCTION

The action research study I describe in this paper arose in a rather circuitous way. For many years, at conferences and in writing, I have shared with others in the profession some of my more systematic reflections on teaching within the undergraduate elementary education program at the University of North Florida, both to attempt meaning-making for myself and to invite colleagues to offer their insights. Such motivations have not dissipated over time; teaching remains incredibly challenging. However, other forces brought me to this research effort as well.

In 1994, the University's College of Education and Human Services obtained a significant Federal grant to investigate and "invent" innovative approaches to preparing elementary teachers for urban schools. As a multi-faceted endeavor, the Jacksonville Urban Educational Partnership embraced many components, with teams of professionals concentrating on separate but interrelated dimensions involved in the preparation of educators. Partnerships included K-12 professionals in local urban schools, faculty at local community colleges, faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences, along with faculty in the College of Education and Human Services. Because of my on-going interests in examining the beliefs and attitudes of preservice teachers as they influence their pedagogical styles and approaches to the curriculum, I assumed responsibilities as co-chair of the Early Field Experiences Strategic Learning Team.

This portion of the grant emphasized the connection between the beliefs and attitudes of preservice teachers in elementary education and their early field experiences, based on the presumption that such beliefs and attitudes should be addressed early in professional programs and that field experiences in urban settings would be appropriate venues for developing positive beliefs and attitudes with regard to urban children and schools. Not specified were which beliefs and attitudes should be emphasized and how pedagogy to address them might unfold, nor was any direction offered for the theoretical bases which should govern such processes. However, a clear adoption of school reform measures as defined by legislative mandates and outlined by the technocratic literature permeated grant activity, with a focus on improving the work of urban schools in order to better meet the needs of society, especially the economic ones. Only a hint of social reconstructionism emerged in some of the references to the literature undergirding the initiative and in subsequent grant discussions--though participants offered such hints as critical to any serious consideration of enduring reform.

Many activities of the team focused on introductory courses within the teacher-education continuum and their accompanying field experiences in urban schools and agencies so as to promote deeper understanding of the culture of urban schools and their communities, as well as to increase students' understanding of themselves as emerging professionals. Not surprisingly, the team very soon became aware that the territory they investigated is exceedingly complex. Preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes about urban schools and communities and their potential roles in these environments are accompanied by beliefs and attitudes about children, schools, the teaching process, the learning process, the nature of knowing and knowledge. Over their life experiences, these individuals develop assumptions and form conceptions and misconceptions

about the fundamental ideas embedded in the work of teaching; they enter teacher preparation programs with a wealth of cognitive, emotional, and philosophical material already developed which is relevant to the roles they wish to assume.

The team thus assumed that teaching is based on these conceptual and attitudinal "building blocks" and that the teacher-education curriculum should likewise focus on such beliefs, assumptions, and conceptions as fundamental in the process of honing professional competence. Throughout the initial teacher-education experience, therefore, preservice teachers and their instructors should endeavor to develop understanding of the self as a foundation for becoming reflective practitioners.

Out of this grounding, the team's agenda moved toward examining how we might help preservice teachers in their own efforts to process and to challenge their beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, conceptions, and misconceptions about teaching, teachers, learning, children, schools, knowing, and knowledge. Furthermore, we acknowledged that the agenda appropriately encompasses the entire formal teacher-education continuum and extends into professional practice. Such a process therefore involves a move from examining beliefs and assumptions as a more general notion and process with regard to professional involvement in urban schools and with urban communities to more focused consideration about the tasks and challenges of teaching, both in reference to those beliefs and as outgrowths of those beliefs. This subtle shift reflects the continuum of professional growth undergirding the preservice teacher-education program in Elementary Education.

My teaching in an advanced methods course within the elementary education program became a kind of laboratory for exploring how to address such emerging beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, conceptions, and misconceptions at a later point in professional preparation. Inasmuch as "Integrated Learning Environments" is a course taken just before the culminating internship, it provides yet another key stage during which preservice teachers examine their beliefs and conceptions; thus the process begun in their lower-division coursework becomes both recursive and developmental. With a colleague who also teaches this course, I studied how various pedagogical approaches and conceptions of curriculum might work together to promote the development of more thoughtful professionals who are both sensitive to the challenges of working in urban schools and optimistic about their abilities to solve problems reflectively and collaboratively.

THE CONTEXT FOR ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

The action research effort I describe here focused on pedagogical processes involved in several sections of an advanced "methods course" taken by undergraduate Elementary Education preservice teachers the term prior to student teaching or internship.
Quite expectedly, institutional and local school contexts influenced both the design of course experiences and the path the research study followed.

Because the university works closely with the local urban school district, course discussion of curriculum and the role of the teacher in urban settings inevitably reflected how that district

envisions curriculum reform. The university assumes that its teacher-education graduates will help make possible the reforms that the district promotes. Further, the university's teacher education program acknowledges that the beliefs and assumptions of preservice teachers about urban learners play a critical role toward their subsequent success in teaching within urban settings. The course thus incorporated a concern for promoting the reform of school experiences for urban children in keeping with constructivist views of learning and the contributions of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Along with the development of particular pedagogical abilities, therefore, the course focused on bringing into awareness and then developing the beliefs and attitudes of these preservice teachers in reference to teaching, learning, knowing, and knowledge. Of course, attention to beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, conceptions, and misconceptions about learning, teaching, and knowledge occurs throughout professional preparation. Specifically, however, this course provided an opportunity both to elucidate the effects of students' earlier work in "Introduction to Education" and in the concomitant early field experiences supporting and enriching that course and to expand upon the themes and competencies established in all of the earlier courses and field experiences in the elementary-education teacher-preparation program.

"Integrated Learning Environments" addressed a wide array of attitudes and beliefs about elementary teaching in the context of the conceptions of curriculum experiences to be offered in urban schools. A key assumption of the course was that only when teacher-education students are able to analyze, challenge, and process these beliefs and conceptions will they be able to plan appropriately for their work with children and to implement approaches designed to promote substantive learning. These attitudes, beliefs, conceptions, and misconceptions profoundly influence how preservice teachers both conceive the purposes for their teaching and then design plans for achieving those purposes. Thus, while the course ostensibly was a "methods course"--that is, it focused on curriculum and pedagogy appropriate for integrating content areas within elementary classrooms--it also embraced a rich definition of curriculum in the process of developing pedagogical competence. The multidimensional nature of curriculum--including the official, taught, learned, and tested curricula (Cuban, 1993), the hidden curriculum (Giroux, 1983; Jackson, 1990), and the null curriculum (Eisner, 1985)--and the attendant complexities of such a perspective became a central topic. In addition, these elementary-education majors were to view their work from other vantage points: the role of the teacher in affective learning, the responsibilities of the teacher to accept and develop differences, the complexity undergirding the motivation to learn, the relationship between school and society, and the processes of professional growth throughout one's career. Clearly the technocratic character of a methods course is blended here with purposes representative of curriculum and foundations courses at the undergraduate level. Indeed, the professional learning in this course was essentially process-oriented and only secondarily focused upon particular content and skill acquisition.

The course worked on the assumption that underlying students' explicitly shared statements, products, and actions are their beliefs and conceptions about teachers, students, knowledge, teaching, learning, and knowing. A key purpose was therefore to develop and support preservice teacher-education students in the process of exploring beneath the surface of reflective responses

so that they might construct authentic beliefs and actions as foundations for teaching and learning. Figure 1 offers one depiction of how these notions might interrelate within the context of a particular course (Scheirer, 1995, revised).

Several course activities were designed to promote structured reflection and analysis of beliefs and attitudes. One such activity was the use of "think pieces," a pedagogical technique in which, for 10 to 15 minutes at some point during a given class session, students address in writing key conceptions related to teaching practice. Students' writing in these contexts has yielded insight into their assumptions, beliefs, conceptions, and misconceptions regarding teaching, teachers, learning, students, knowing, and knowledge; this material then serves as the basis for subsequent reflection and for class analysis. Several of the topics which generated material for examining beliefs, assumptions, conceptions, and misconceptions included: their views of the physical appearance of the classroom they envision having; the assumptions they have about the nature of the children they intend to teach; their own memories of key learning experiences they had in the classroom as students; the plans they have for establishing communication between the classroom and the home and community; special skills, talents, and interests they intend to share with the children they teach and with their colleagues.

Examination of these constructs thus became central to course experiences. Class discussion sessions frequently employed variants of the Paideia seminar to explore ideas and to consider in depth significant stimulus material selected for students to read or view. Preservice teachers were thereby to develop and justify cogently particular views regarding learners, the processes of learning, appropriate pedagogy to support learning, and the forms of knowledge to be developed.

Beyond such interactive course experiences lay the centerpiece of the course, the "curriculum project," conceived as a plan for facilitating the learning of elementary children over a significant period of time and integrating the knowledge bases of several content areas traditionally explored in the elementary school. The guidelines for the project assumed a constructivist stance with regard to children's learning, along with requirements that curriculum provisions be developmentally appropriate and well-grounded in significant knowledge bases. Moreover, course experiences encouraged preservice teachers to view elementary children as agents of their own learning; thus, these preservice teachers were to develop their curriculum projects from the vantage point of how they might facilitate and coach children in the processes of learning. Curriculum, as a construct, was thus presented as experiential, grounded in knowledge, social contexts, and personal relationships.

This course also used a semi-structured self-evaluation assignment at the close of the semester. Students were guided in reflecting on both their pedagogical skills and their conceptions regarding the classroom at that point in their professional development--a point that directly preceded their intensive internship experience. Analysis of this material revealed the complexity of challenging and supporting beliefs and assumptions and developing thinking as individuals move into roles carrying professional responsibility.

The overall design for the course clearly supported the position that it is the teacher who is responsible for shaping the curriculum in the classroom. The teacher thus becomes the major "curriculum planner" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) within a complex social context who utilizes both professional and "personal, practical knowledge" carefully reflected upon and analyzed. The action research study examined how this conception of teacher as curriculum planner is developed in the context of an advanced preservice course.

METHODOLOGY

Over a period of two years and six semesters--from 1995 to 1997, the experiences within several sections of "Integrated Learning Environments" were studied in terms of their reflection of students' developing conceptions of curriculum and of their roles in defining the nature of the curriculum they will develop in their own classrooms. Several traditions within qualitative research influenced the design for the study. Inasmuch as the faculty participants were responsible for pedagogical decision-making, their perspectives were key to the research experience. Pedagogical action research therefore provided the "umbrella concept" for the procedures used within the study.

Action research was defined as "the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it" (Elliott, 1991, p. 69). Such a research approach recognizes the important role that participants have in research as they seek to reflectively improve professional practice and the important uses to which professionals may put the research enterprise. Further, the theoretical perspectives underlying qualitative research in general and many of the research techniques themselves seem particularly appropriate when research is put to use in improving one's own pedagogy (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

However, another set of perspectives influenced the design of the action research process. Arising from a strong belief in the potential arising from curriculum inquiry and the concomitant valuing of the teacher's narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), the effort was fundamentally a curricular endeavor involving cycles of planning, implementation, and reflection. Research and curriculum work became inseparable.

Action research in this context was, therefore, "simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants . . . in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162). The method of "a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting" (p. 162) became embedded over time in the behavior of the faculty as they confronted pedagogical challenges. The process was integrated with on-going, taken-for-granted reflective teaching practices and thus was a natural part of the teaching experience. It was in essence "curriculum action research" directed toward improving our own curriculum through researching our own teaching (McKernan, 1991).

The underlying research questions addressed two levels of concern. The primary purpose of the action research was descriptive; inquiry focused on how these preservice teachers actually

conceptualized the nature of curriculum experiences for elementary students, how they defined the nature of their role in shaping those curriculum experiences, how they planned for promoting those experiences within the elementary classroom, and the nature of the complex development of the curriculum thinking of preservice teachers. While a key characteristic of qualitative research as emphasizing the "the particular" (Eisner, 1991) may have been ignored or even violated, for better or worse the focus here was more on the collective responses of groups of students rather than on their individual patterns of professional growth. Indeed the clear programmatic focus of the parent project to which this effort was linked led to such decisions about a focus on the collective.

A second purpose for inquiry--one which is critical to any effort labeled action research--was directed at how faculty might promote the growth of preservice teachers in elementary education at this stage in their programs, particularly how faculty could effectively foster the desirable processes of reflection and analysis and what responses they could make when their students find these analytic experiences both difficult and uncomfortable. Therefore, the study sought to describe and interpret the interactions among instructors, students, materials, pedagogical activities, and feedback and evaluation procedures as these occurred over time, always with a view toward how course processes might be improved.

The design of qualitative case study research (e.g., Merriam, 1988) suggested specific research techniques for this action research, such as observation of and participation in class sessions, both informal and instructional conversations with participants outside of class, and the analysis of a wide variety of documents. Furthermore, the faculty participants endeavored to utilize reflective processes themselves throughout the research even as they worked to promote reflection and analysis with the teacher-education students. The nature of the "case" in this research instance was the set of events occurring under the label of a particular teacher-education course over a period of several semesters. Parenthetically, much also will need to be learned about the individual learning experiences of particular students in such a course, obviously an area for additional study.

The study utilized several sources of qualitative data collected across six semesters and involving two instructors:

1) course materials including accreditation documents, syllabi, texts (both required texts for all students and recommended texts), and handouts;
2) planning documents of the instructors for class sessions and instructors' descriptions of particular course activities;
3) the field notes of a one of the instructors who was a participant-observer present during many class sessions of one course section taught by the other instructor;
4) the reflective notes--as a kind of research diary (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993)--of instructors regarding what occurred during their own class sessions;
5) notes from informal discussions between the two instructors;
6) selected student materials developed in connection with course assignments, e.g., plans for teaching particular "lessons," descriptions of integrated curriculum "projects" designed

for use within elementary classrooms, and written statements about the beliefs and conceptions supporting such decision-making; and
7) examples of student writing of several kinds--in response to formal essay "prompts" on course topics, as part of class sessions when a topic was presented to promote reflection on key issues, and in the form of "self-evaluations" at the end of the course.

These materials--gathered quite naturally in the course of reflective teaching--collectively formed an integrated database for the instructors to use in their efforts to improve pedagogical practice.

Educational criticism (Eisner, 1991) guided the processes of interpreting and analyzing the data and the action research experiences. Based on the concept of educational connoisseurship, educational criticism endeavors to make public what educators may appreciate, see, and know about what they seek to understand. It "requires practitioners who are capable of making knowledgeable and informed statements and judgements about curriculum intentions and resultant activities" (McKernan, 1991, p. 207). Its ends are heuristic, directed toward the promotion of deeper conversations with others. The structure of educational criticism includes four dimensions which contribute to the process of making meaning of data: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics (Eisner, 1991). The four dimensions are highly interrelated, each supporting the purposes of the other three. Addressing one inevitably involves attention to the others.

Description forms the base for educational criticism. It provides the framework for the work of interpretation, evaluation, and the identification of themes. It establishes context and allows others to enter a world, if only partially; though description can never be complete enough, it provides the first step in enabling others to see some of how we have come to know what we know.

The descriptions of the context for action research and of the course itself earlier in this paper--descriptions which are indeed too brief--are intended to provide other teacher educators with at least a flavor of what occurred. While much more could be said, for purposes of sharing the emergent lessons from this action research experience, I shall focus on elucidating several themes which I have thus far identified as pertinent. Indeed, educational criticism "places a premium on meaning and the interpretation of qualities" (McKernan, 1991, p. 207). Moreover, since these themes have not "arisen" of their own accord, my identification of them will also reveal much about the interpretations of what the data may mean, given differing perspectives drawn from the literature. Further, because selecting one line of interpretation over another is a normative task, simultaneous with such interpretations are judgments about what is good and appropriate regarding a host of matters--the purposes for schooling, the roles of teachers, the nature of learning, the nature of knowledge, and so on. Thus, thematics, interpretation, and evaluation co-exist; the articulation of themes which follows will become a "window" into the interpretations and evaluation which appear useful to understanding the data at hand.

Several dangers lie within this process of educational criticism. One, of course, is that discussion can become much too glib. Another is overlooking interpretations other than what is presented,

whether these interpretations augment the explanations, challenge them with alternative views, or account for the data more powerfully. Thirdly, the process may not attend to the "ladder of inference" (Argyris, Putnam, & McLain Smith, 1985, as described by Altrichter et al., 1993) from one level of data to the next level of data as diligently as desirable; scrutiny of the process of interpretation itself is thus more difficult. While complete avoidance of such dangers is likely impossible, the obligation for the researcher is to acknowledge the limitations of what is presented and continually to seek alternative explanations which may be heuristic in the research context. Indeed interpretation and explanation of these action research experiences are far from complete and will continue, if only because planning, acting, and reflecting upon teaching continue even today. However, my own sense of the limitations of what I offer is tempered by the desire to risk communication and thus to further our conversations over matters of import.

The themes occur in several sets. One set of themes focuses on the cognitive and emotional responses of the preservice teachers to course experiences and requirements. Because instructors inferred their conceptualizing about curriculum issues from students' written and oral responses to course experiences and tasks, it is toward understanding this nexus that much analytic and interpretive effort has been directed. For example, as reflected in the subtitle for this paper, students revealed significant frustration and resistance to constructing curriculum plans which deviated from their own experiences in schooling, their conceptions of the curriculum work of teachers acquired from short-term field experiences in local schools, their beliefs and assumptions about what the curriculum work of teachers is, and their almost exclusive focus on teaching techniques in previous methods courses.[2] As they tackled the development of the curriculum project, they repeatedly expressed the wish that they could "do a learning center," the main requirement of the course in years previous. Tasks which required students to use knowledge developed in previous courses were seen as unfair and inconvenient, sometimes merely because they had to use library materials instead of the textbooks from those courses which they had already sold to others.

Another set of themes highlights these students' own efforts to assimilate course concepts within extant, but often inadequate, cognitive structures representing their notions of teaching, learning, knowledge, and knowing and the roles of teachers and students within school settings. Students revealed substantial difficulty in building new and enriched cognitive structures to represent what teachers might do in shaping the curriculum experiences offered to children. The results of this research thus underscore the constructivist dimensions in the learning of preservice teachers as they confront enriched views of what the concept of curriculum includes and what curriculum roles they might assume in reference to their own teaching practice. In addition, the need for elementary teacher education to assume a more strongly critical stance toward the processes of teaching (Giroux, 1983) becomes clearer as a result of this research experience.

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[2]This report does not attribute comments or statements to particular students for several reasons. First, connecting any specific statement to a particular student is not necessary in the context of this research study since the purposes for the action research were to promote instructors' reflection in order to improve their own pedagogical practice. Secondly, the breadth of the study's database, extending over several semesters and including two instructors, permits an integrative approach to the reporting process, a procedure which also assists in maintaining student anonymity.

A third set of themes centers on notions of what might be termed "professional efficacy." It is in this realm that technocratic views of teaching emerge in contrast to views that assume teachers to be empowered decision-makers with regard to curriculum development and pedagogy. The attraction of an empowered role is countered by the reluctance of preservice teachers to assume the intellectual responsibilities which accompany its demands. The preservice teachers manifest both a "learner dependency" on the instructor and a reluctance to examine their curriculum efforts in reference to standards and criteria grounded in research, practice, and philosophy. Thus, the discussion also attempts to "unpack" the dynamics undergirding these contrasting views of curriculum responsibility which preservice teachers exhibit.

The following section reorganizes and characterizes these themes as issues for consideration by teacher educators in elementary education. It describes in greater detail the processes of interpretation and evaluation which support six of those which seem most compelling.

ISSUES FROM INITIAL ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ACTION RESEARCH DATA

It became apparent that the issues arising from this action research project are inextricably interrelated. Indeed, effective, sensitive, and thoughtful response to any one set would require concomitant attention to the other issues. However, in keeping with the heuristic purposes for this discussion, they appear separately if only to clearly label the various dynamics involved in the complex processes of helping others in their processes of becoming teachers. As noted above, data analysis and interpretation must continue in order to more fully explore what these issues can teach us.

A Perceived Resistance to Intellectuality

One key interpretation early in the process of explaining the dynamics of classroom events was that preservice teacher-education students demonstrate a kind of "resistance" (Davis, 1992; Lather, 1991) to the intellectual nature of teaching tasks. This possibility became evident in several situations.

Student feedback, particularly in class discussions of course requirements, indicated that they view their own learning roles as passively taking notes during lecture sessions, "mastering" content in ways to perform well on multiple-choice tests--often, incidentally, forgetting it as soon as possible, following precise step-by-step directions to accomplish particular course tasks that reflect little complexity, and focusing on one course or one set of courses at a time. For example, upon entering the classroom, students might ask whether we were just going to talk again today; similarly, after absences, students frequently asked whether they missed "anything important." Such comments overlook the dynamic nature of building one's understanding of key ideas, the intricacies of problem-solving processes, the complexity of fostering the learning process in others, and the integrated nature of professional knowledge across a continuum of development. Our preservice teachers seem to manifest categorical, segmented thinking at very concrete levels, with little experience of "conceptual flow" for themselves. They paradoxically articulate a desire

for active learning while also resisting the challenges of thinking through significant pedagogical tasks in order to solidly base their emerging practice.

Lather's (1991) definition of student "resistance" can be informative in this context. While her context was that of a liberatory curriculum within a women's studies course, the definition she offers may be useful. One of her graduate students articulated the working definition of resistance for her research project:

> a word for the fear, dislike, hesitance most people have about turning their entire lives upside down and watching everything they have ever learned disintegrate into lies. "Empowerment" may be liberating, but it is also a lot of hard work and new responsibility to sort through one's life and rebuild according to one's own values and choices. (Lather, 1991, p. 76)

While the resistance which appears in the context of "Integrated Learning Environments" is probably not nearly so encompassing as what emerges within women's studies, it may be at least somewhat similar and equally deserving of instructor empathy and support because it challenges previously held views of what constitutes the nature of learning and the nature of teaching. Students are often left to deal with a view of learning and teaching at odds with their own experiences, with dominant cultural perspectives, and, in some respects, with what they have learned in previous teacher-education courses. Quite expectedly, they often respond by "deny[ing] the importance of" (Davis, 1992, p. 232) the very concepts deemed central to the course.

The dynamic of resistance which emerged in this course had potentially other origins. Preservice teachers find it extremely difficult to appreciate the complexity and challenge of the private, intense, highly intellectual process of planning for the public manifestations of teaching. Cultural myths about the work of teachers predominate in their views so that the public face of teaching takes precedence. Further, the planning process itself is viewed as nonproblematical. In such a situation it is possible that on-going, collaborative, and reflective engagement with experienced professionals--before school, after school, as well as during the teaching day--may help the preservice professional in conceptualizing and framing these curricular challenges and in responding appropriately to these essential planning tasks.

Yet another origin of resistance may be the "technocratic or alienated consciousness" of the profession itself (Bullough, Goldstein, & Holt, 1982, p. 135) supported by a positivist view of knowledge. Such perspectives lead to an absence of normative reflection and discussion, even when school situations demand them. Indeed, at its extreme this consciousness reveals an alienation from the self and an over-reliance on outside experts, a condition at odds with the view of the teacher as reflective practitioner, critical thinker, and problem-solver. Ironically, the emergence of resistance in such a context can also reveal a healthy response to alienation since "it suggests students are struggling with the issues, taking them seriously enough to be upset by them" (Davis, 1991, p. 233).

At the same time as the concept of resistance may be used to explain some of the dynamics observed during this action research experience, the notion must also be significantly challenged. Doing so is key to interpretation and analysis if we are not to remain in a quagmire of conflict, blaming, and arrogance. Students do not simply exhibit a "false consciousness" which is easily identified and removed by a more enlightened teacher. Indeed, many studies of classroom dynamics "demonstrate how teachers and students set limits on each others' actions" (Giroux, 1983, p. 53). Instead, we must challenge the concept of resistance by listening to what students might be saying in order to open up discussion and to seek deeper levels of understanding; the locus of our efforts surely is on the interactions embedded in our classrooms which either promote or challenge resistance (Lindquist, 1994). The complexities of the learning process are indeed "more nuanced and conflicted" (p. 6) than the concept of student resistance implies.

The Need to Shift from a Focus on the Self

Throughout the data there was strong evidence that preservice teachers view their own experience of learning particular material and skills as the central focus for the teacher-education curriculum. That is, they focus on their own "studenting" (Jurich, 1995) and hence reveal what some educators term a dramatic ego-absorption. The concern with attaining a certain course grade, with acquiring a particular "grade point average," and with not receiving any perceived negative feedback on course assignments suggests a focus on self and the maintenance of self as it currently exists.

Curricular requirements are "taken personally" in that the teacher-education students have not yet become focused on how these requirements relate to their subsequent work with children. They view learning as the acquisition of a few discrete new behaviors easily assimilated into the current set of mental schema. Metacognition and reflection are seldom employed. Learning as a holistic process which often requires substantial accommodation within conceptual schema is avoided, except as such a view may appear as an item on a multiple-choice test in a course on learning theory. Unfortunately, such a limited view of learning is likely to be carried into professional roles in their own classrooms, therefore making it likely that the same limited views of learning will be recapitulated in the dynamic and complex relationships with children.

Many preservice teachers reveal that they readily focus on themselves as performers with fragmented tasks to do, as opposed to focusing on their professional holistic development in terms of what is required if they are to challenge and nurture children for the myriad of demands in the 21st century. In essence, the focus of the teacher-education experience has not shifted to the children who will be ultimately served; the immediacy of the experiences of teacher-education students, their demands upon professors and the curriculum, and the cultural assumptions that learning occurs because of someone else's teaching make it likely that the system itself will maintain this perspective.

Concomitant with the manifestation of this fragmentation in pre-professional thinking is the uncritical acceptance of a primary ideology (Alexander, 1984). There is at times almost a logical disjuncture between the rhetoric preservice teachers use to describe their own teaching goals and

their actual plans for instruction; separated from the hard work of honing meaningful curricular experiences for children is a ready belief in "loving children," nurturing them, and making learning "fun" for them. What complexity lies behind such a view is often overlooked, and, in that sense, these preservice teachers both exhibit a received ideology and seek a received technology of teaching (Bullough, Goldstein, & Holt, 1982).

One task for the teacher-education curriculum is to break this "studenting" perspective and to develop within preservice teachers the "teachering" perspective (Jurich, 1995) as a frame for thinking about learning and teaching. We need to hone more effectively our own valuing of "connected knowing" through our unrelenting commitments to "connected teaching" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) where "both teacher and students engage in the process of thinking, and they talk out what they are thinking in a public dialogue" (p. 219). What emerges is a new configuration of relationships: "teacher-student with students-teachers" (Freire, 1970, p. 67). Relinquishing the self-absorbed student perspective will then allow preservice teachers to participate in the professional tasks they face. And, coupled with a necessary critical consciousness (Giroux, 1983), they will be positioned to learn from the perspective of what we as teachers have to do in order to promote authentic learning among all children.

The Constituency for Teacher Education Programs

We who taught this course unabashedly assume that the main focus for our efforts as teacher educators is their ultimate effect on the learning of the public-school students whom our students will ultimately serve. By this we do not mean that we adopt a simplistic outcomes-based approach to assessing teacher effectiveness. Rather, our stance is that the work of our graduates in their own classrooms should reflect ideological and philosophical commitments congruent with democratic, progressive views of schooling based on constructivist approaches to learning. With such an agenda, we frequently did not find it appropriate to adjust course requirements in order to make the experiences of teacher-education students more comfortable in the present because of our beliefs that the needs of elementary students would not be well served.

Hence, the developmental and intellectual needs of our own students may at times not have been met. This issue, which relates directly to the concern noted above regarding the egocentrism of preservice teacher-education students, points to a significant area of conflict and inconsistency within our own work. Indeed, unless we make meaningful contact with our own students over these very issues, our efforts will not have the maximum impact on their work when they enter the teaching profession. One approach to addressing them was to explore them directly with the teacher-education students so that they might ponder the inherent issues. Course activities in these action research efforts attempted such discussion, using common readings which could encourage students in developing awareness of the complexities of their own learning and of their future roles.

An additional response for faculty is the need to more effectively model--at the appropriate developmental level--those approaches and beliefs-in-action that we wish preservice teachers to assume within their own teaching styles: experiential approaches, grounded in knowledge, social

contexts, and personal relationships, and directed toward a more just society. Modeling at this level of complexity, beyond the demonstration of particular techniques, is of course an extremely subtle and complex process both to exemplify and to analyze heuristically. It is consistent, though, with the vision of teaching of the Jacksonville Urban Educational Partnership itself--that of teacher educators in collaboration with preservice teachers for the sake of the K-12 students whom the latter will serve directly.

Holistic Professional Development

Thinking holistically is crucial for teaching, but students in teacher education have typically experienced most of their own learning in intellectual fragments. Their educational histories indicate that they have not experienced interrelationships among courses, nor have they thought about dominant themes which might drive their own thinking and behaving in the world. The separation among learning experiences in schools is reinforced by a separation between what is learned in academic coursework and what one might learn "on the job." Antipathy to theory in the larger society leads to a reinforcement of this "separatist" conception of learning within the professional program. Ironically, the notion of an empowered learner who seeks meaning in the world--a central premise of the constructivist view of learning--seems foreign.

This action research study suggests that within the teacher-education curriculum our students have adopted a deliberate, self-imposed "amnesia." That is, they approach each course as separate, with a focus on the immediate requirements, removed from what they may have learned previously. Such compartmentalization in their conception of their own process of doing work in courses--aided by the hegemony of the behavioral objective in much of current educational practice--leads students to demonstrate a kind of resistance if they are asked to use concepts from other courses in carrying out a complex assignment in a subsequent course. For example, they readily attempt to "teach off the top of their heads" in terms of acquiring content background when implementing pedagogical assignments; the need for a strong substantive background is not assumed, so they typically "coast" on the knowledge they already have. Additionally, they may recoil if asked to consider the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive needs of children at a particular stage of development when developing an extensive curriculum project. Under such circumstances, it is extremely difficult to develop a cohesive, integrated professional thinker, able to problem-solve in complex situations.

Thus, the teacher-education curriculum itself must leave its exclusive "bottom-up" and "top-down" thinking in curriculum organization (Posner, 1995) driven by an objectives orientation. Instead it must adopt an unabashed "process model" (Stenhouse, 1975) in which richness, recursion, relations, and rigor predominate in curriculum decision-making (Doll, 1993). The complexity of professional learning demands that more sophisticated forms of curriculum design and organization emerge within teacher-education if it is to forge ahead in meeting the demands of the next century. Further, the mission of preservice teacher education might effectively broaden to include coherent examination by students of the socio-political context of schooling across course experiences (Liston & Zeichner, 1991), along with an invigorated view of the teacher as curriculum researcher and developer (Stenhouse, 1975).

The Reconceptualization of the Nature of Teaching Itself

The foregoing discussion of issues which emerge from the initial analyses and interpretations of the data suggests that teacher education may be trying to redefine the very essence of the nature of the elementary teacher. The task becomes difficult since many of teacher-education students wish to maintain the role as they currently know it because they have chosen to enter the profession based on that conceptualization. While they may be invited to agree that the job needs to be improved, they are not comfortable with the dramatic changes in teacher education which challenge their own motivations and proclivities. The clear need is to develop teachers able to analyze the multiple versions and demands of learning and be somewhat comfortable in carrying out many complex tasks, even those not easily accommodated by their personality profiles--all with the intent of helping <u>others</u> learn. Such an agenda is at odds with the technocratic view of teaching which dominates student perspectives.

This hegemony of the technocratic view of teaching is crystallized in a recent casual comment by a student currently enrolled in "Integrated Learning Environments"--" I don't know what the course is about. We've already learned about integrating subjects in the other courses we've had." Apparently, since he had already been exposed to technical skills involved with integrating content areas in the elementary curriculum, he concluded that nothing more needed to be learned. Teaching is summed up as a set of technical competencies.

The Replacement of Popular Conceptions of Teaching with Professional Conceptions of Teaching

When preservice teachers begin their professional studies, they bring with them to their teacher-education programs many perspectives regarding the children they will teach, the society they will serve, the purposes appropriate for schooling, the methodologies which will promote those ends, and the teaching roles they must concomitantly assume. Much of this popular "knowledge" about children and parents, our culture, schools, and teaching is myth (Combs, 1979), and much is "manufactured" for political ends (Berliner & Biddle, 1997).

As preservice teachers proceed in their professional coursework, they confront alternatives to these powerful cultural conceptions of teaching--alternatives based upon honed theory, research efforts, and what Davis (1997) terms "wise practices." Examination of their products--essays, lessons, projects, verbal statements--during this action research experience indicates that preservice teachers' behaviors may at particular times reveal an adoption of professional conceptions of teaching, but those behaviors and the thinking processes behind them are not always consistent nor durable. In addition, faculty need to attend more to deliberate processes designed to confront those myths about

Indeed the acquisition of pedagogical expertise is a long-term process across the continuum of professional preparation. However, what is also clear here is that the popular culture's conceptions of teaching, schooling, and children powerfully re-emerge in preservice teachers' thinking, especially when they focus on tasks not directly nor obviously related to their attitudes

about urban teaching and the reform agendas for schools. It is as if a regression occurs in their thinking, or a reversion to the thinking of the popular culture. The teacher-education curriculum thus must address in subsequent pre-professional experiences all that has preceded them so as to insure that the professional knowledge base becomes central to decision-making and that the popular culture's perspectives become informative rather than directive. Teacher-educators must consistently offer much emotional and cognitive support to their students as the latter grapple with the demands of such deep professional development.

LESSON-LEARNING FROM ACTION RESEARCH

Obviously this paper reflects only part of what could be said about this action research experience. The vast amount of data collected over two years and the complexity of the issues involved deserve continuing reflection and analysis. Moreover, much more could be said by carrying forward the threads of interpretation suggested by the various strands of the rather wide-ranging literature mentioned in this overview. In spite of these limitations, however, there are indeed lessons for us as teacher educators as we attempt to promote the curriculum thinking of preservice teachers in undergraduate elementary education.

Beyond Complaint

It may be tempting to read this account as complaint and accusation from faculty about the lamentable performance of teacher-education students. Such an interpretation is not only too easy, but also overly simplistic and misdirected. As Pogo said so long ago, we teacher educators who nurture the curriculum thinking of our students have also "met the enemy and he is us [sic]"! If the results of our teaching are not what we seek, then we are obligated to examine our own complicity in what occurs.

On one level, we perhaps are doing the wrong things in our teaching. Haberman's analysis (1997) of how urban schools promote the "ideology of nonwork" (p. 499) reminds us of how our own actions as educators can lead to ends which are anathemas to our purposes. His analysis underscores the quite inadvertent promotion of counterproductive student behaviors which often occurs as a result of school practices: the presentation of content in stand-alone segments which require no connection to preceding or follow-up material; the acceptance of student excuse-making as a substitute for intellectual effort; the provision of unlimited opportunities for expected performance. We in teacher education often do likewise, with attendant consequences--fragmented professional development of preservice teachers, a technocratic rather than intellectual climate, a focus on current student behavior rather than the emergence of professional teacher behavior, a reluctance to make meaningful demands of students--which are non-supportive of the development of philosophically committed, reflective teachers.

On a quite different level, it is quite probable that we are not doing enough of the right things. Very rarely does the daily conversation in our undergraduate teacher education program at a regional state university include exploration of ideology or the assumption of a critical stance to our work. Rather, the conversation among students and faculty alike is almost exclusively

technical, focused on method and outcome--the latter nearly always defined by and accepted from outside. Confronting unreflected ideologies about primary teaching (Alexander, 1984) is part of our mission, however, along with deep critique of the social and political consequences occurring even under the guise of apparently benign, nurturing approaches to teaching (Sharp & Green, 1975). Indeed, such analysis of the socio-political context of schooling would seem prerequisite to a revitalized form of social reconstructionist teacher education (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). The issues raised by this research effort should serve to remind us that our ethical--and, therefore, professional--responsibilities as faculty are to assume a clear stance relative to views of learning, teaching, and knowledge construction. While all philosophies and theories of schooling should be permitted voice, we cannot continue to appear voiceless ourselves. We must assume our duties openly, with deliberateness and deliberation and in a forthright manner. Determining our common direction out of developing a critical consciousness is of paramount importance.

However, such increased focus on ideologies and their deep influences on our own schooling practices should not lead to an imposition of a critical theory defined by those outside the context of our work (Elliott, 1991; McKernan, 1991). What we instead should seek is rigorous reflection and questioning in the journey toward self-understanding--perhaps best stated as "a self-generating, reflexive and critical pedagogy emerging as a form of action research" (Elliott, 1991, p. 116). Tenets of critical theory may guide our thinking as we dialogue with many interpretive frames for understanding our experiences, but "grand theory" should not take control of our own efforts of making meaning (McKernan, 1991, pp. 251-252).

As we teacher educators relate with our own students, we must likewise refrain from imposition of our own critical assessments (Lather, 1991). Our role as critical intellectuals needs to shift " from being universalizing spokespersons to acting as cultural workers whose task is to take away the barriers that prevent people from speaking for themselves" (p. ix, Apple, 1991). Again we must examine our own practice closely and confront the trap of intellectual arrogance, even as we share what Welker (1991) terms our own "special knowledge" (p. 35). Given our involvement "in a service bent on empowering the receiver" (p. 34), we gain our "epistemic authority . . . only as it self-destructs" (pp. 34-35). When that happens, preservice teachers will find their own voices.

So, What Else is New?

Such might be one reaction to this paper. Several colleagues have indeed shrugged off the issues inherent in this discussion with the observation that if the processes of teaching and learning are complex and difficult, we must remember that becoming a teacher is indeed hard work and that not all of our students will do well; importantly, though, their views also tend to coincide with a technocratic view of schooling and hence of teacher education. Thus, accepting the challenges raised in this discussion requires concomitant assumptions: of the problematic nature of schooling in the social, cultural, and political context; of the complexity of human learning, and of professional learning as a particular example of learning; of the essentially moral and ethical character of the work that teachers do. Responses to these issues will not be technical in nature, but philosophical, intellectual, emotional, and political.

From another perspective is the lack of surprise that some may have regarding the issues observed during this action research experience. The dynamics I describe here are hardly new to critical theorists and others who have been calling for substantive, authentic, professionally driven reform in elementary teacher education--albeit from their own perspectives. The lesson learned in this context, however, is that the processes so carefully critiqued as general phenomena in the theoretical literature do in fact exist in our own pedagogical homes. The "truth," so to speak, "is [not only] out there"; we no longer need the "X Files" to suggest to us what may exist! Connecting the general to our own program, but from the bottom up, is heuristic for us, even if little new ground is broken conceptually at a theoretical level.

Action research as a professional endeavor can promise no more; indeed its primary rationale may be that it is so self-serving. Making use of "a research tradition . . . which feeds teaching (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 165), we are no longer "prepared to accept blindly the problems [we] face from day to day, but instead . . . reflect upon them and search for solutions and improvements" (Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 5). We are armed with the specifics for substantive change, if we have the will to continue in our efforts. And, as we delineate further the relationships among the specifics and our interpretations through the several levels of inference, we may find more direction for action.

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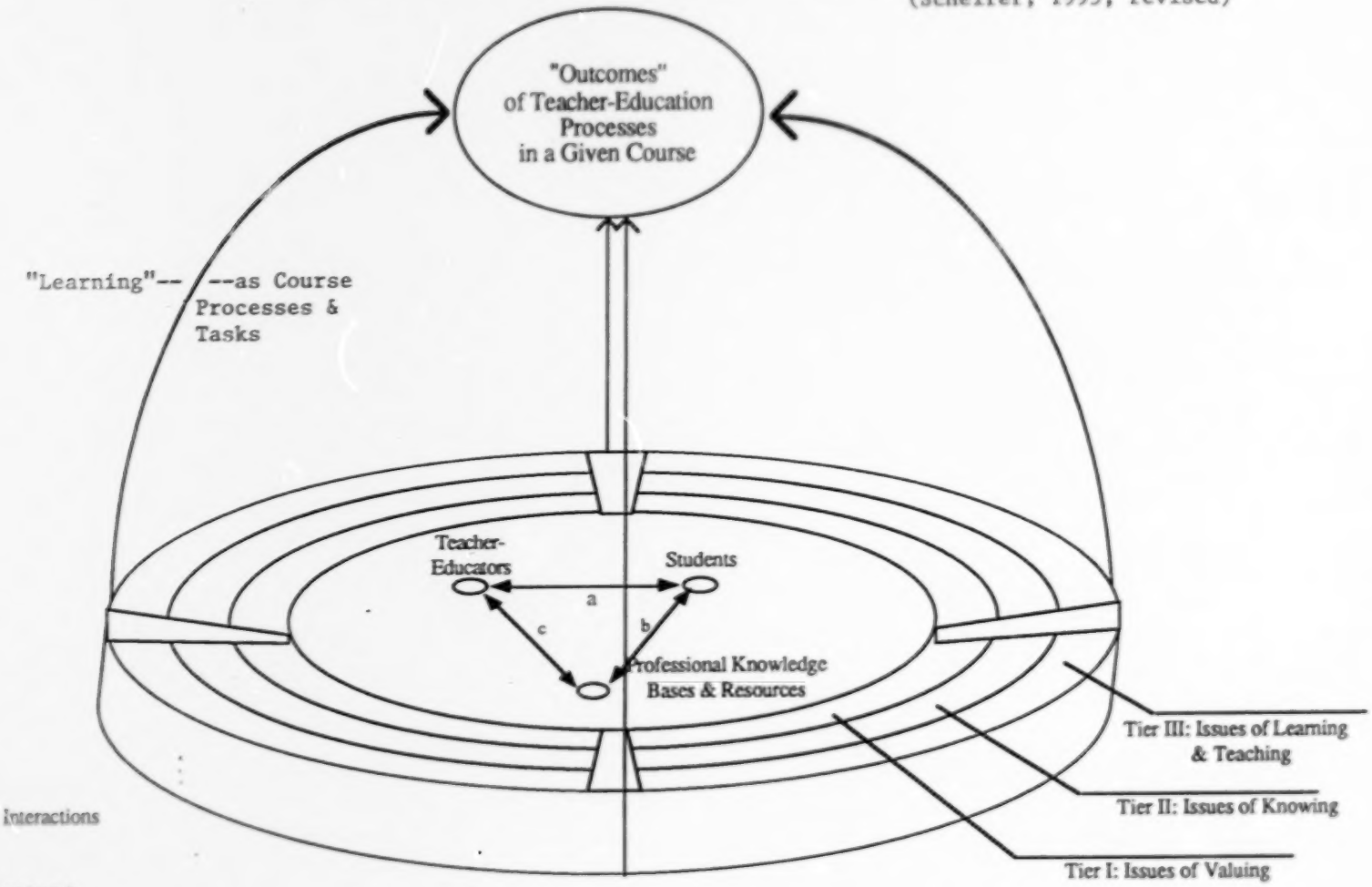
FIGURE 1

The Arena of the Teacher-Education Challenge

(Scheirer, 1995, revised)



a: Pedagogical Interactions

b: Course Content

c: Theoretical Perspective and Rationale for the Course